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ABSTRACT

Using readings from the book "Popular Writing in America: The Interaction of Style and Audience," this paper examines the parameters of literary style. The paper explores the themes and forms of a number of literary genres and describes the various devices used by authors within the confines of these genres to win and maintain audience interest. In addition to presenting a number of techniques used by authors to manipulate audiences, the paper uses quotations from the readings to illustrate the interplay of stylistic considerations and other compositional elements. (FL)

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A STUDY OF THEMES AND STYLES IN POPULAR AMERICAN LITERATURE - BASED ON POPULAR WRITING IN AMERICA: THE INTERACTION OF STYLE & AUDIENCE

(Donald McQuade and Robert Atwan, eds., N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1974)

Helen Ajay

ABSTRACT

This paper is one in a series of essays dealing with the parameters of literary style. The themes and forms of a number of popular literary genres are examined and various devices used by writers, within the confines of these genres, to win and maintain audience interest are described. A book of readings, Popular Writing in America: The Interaction of Style and Audience has been used as the source for exemplars of the stylistic devices presented in the paper.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with certain parameters of literary style. The emphasis in the present paper is on the devices used by writers, within the confines of certain genres, to win and maintain audience interest. A rather unusual format has been chosen for the presentation: a single book of readings, Popular Writing in America: The Interaction of Style and Audience, has been used as the source for exemplars of stylistic devices related to audience response. The selections in this book were thought to be particularly useful because they permit stylistic comparisons on a number of levels - chronological, generic, thematic, and across individual writers. The paper is intended to serve a variety of purposes in addition to presenting some of the techniques used to manipulate audiences. In one respect, it is a critical description of the book from which the selections were taken. On another level, the paper is an attempt at displaying the interplay of stylistic considerations with other compositional elements. Finally, the paper provides illustrative quotations from the readings to show how these audience-related stylistic techniques have been employed by skillful writers, for ultimately "style" is just this: the individual voice in control of an audience.

Popular writing is not used very much as a source for literary content in instruction. However, as the selections in this book make clear, popular writing contains many obvious stylistic devices for manipulating the audience. Such writing, then, provides a rich and largely unexploited reservoir of material for the study of style.

Popular Writing in America: The Interaction of Style and Audience is a large and impressive new paperback of readings intended for use by college classes in literature and composition. The book is divided into five sections: advertisements, newspaper stories, magazine articles, best sellers, and classics. This arrangement provides the reader with a progression from writing that attempts to be readily accessible to the widest possible audience (advertising) to "classics"--writing that, while also "popular," appeals to a more educated audience, an audience that can respond to, and be delighted by, relatively complicated styles of expression, novel themes and characters.

The brief introduction before each section serves primarily to orient the reader to the general types of writing to be expected in the section, and outlines some of the technical problems and typical themes encountered in the writing done for a particular medium. Points of similarity and difference among the five writing categories are also presented. With each selection, the editors provide an introductory paragraph that describes the source for the advertisement, story, or excerpt (in the case of newspaper and magazine articles, the reader is given an idea of the audience and editorial policy of the newspaper or magazine that originally ran the article), and a sentence or two about the author, sometimes referring to his own statements regarding his purpose in writing that particular piece, or his general philosophy about writing.

In addition, discussion questions appear following many of the selections. Though these questions are rather unimaginative in general, they do assist the reader in locating other selections in the book that

are particularly appropriate for comparison, in one way or another, with the selection under discussion.

The book also includes what the editors call a "Rhetorical Table of Contents," which organizes the selections under the headings: "Varieties of Diction" (technical, formal, informal, dialects), "Using Details," "Description" (people, places, objects), "Narration" (factual and historical, fictional), "Exposition" (describing a process, definition, classification, comparison and contrast, dealing with causes and effects), "Argument and Persuasion," and "Personal Experience." Obviously, these categories are not mutually exclusive; so, for example, Uncle Tom's Cabin has been categorized under "dialects" (Varieties of Diction) and under "fictional incidents" (Narration). This categorization is very helpful, as it cuts across the five sections defined by media to allow comparisons on the basis of more specific stylistic and thematic features.

Each of the 153 selections in the book is more than a representative of a type of writing: it is a piece of Americana. The book, then, is far more than a series of illustrations of writing styles in different media; in its representation of the variety of the American voice throughout the history of the country, the book presents a vivid description of ourselves--what has shaped and is shaping our life styles, our world view, and our own images. One great value of this book is its comprehensive mirroring of the culture of the nation, past and present.

Advertising

Advertising copy is, word for word, more expensive in its creation than any other type of writing done today. Paradoxically, such

compositions are undertaken in the knowledge that they will almost certainly be read carelessly and uncritically, with minimal attention. In fact, the success of an ad often depends on the reader's uncritical response; it attempts to gloss over a product's defects and limitations and to imbue the product with varied and mysterious powers, but so vaguely that the reader will not feel the need for evidence to support these claims.

The book contains 55 advertisements organized by subject: smoking, health and beauty aids, eating and drinking, technology, automobiles, self-improvement, education, magazines, and men's fashions. Most of the ads appear to be intended for presentation in a magazine format and all contain pictures. The earliest advertisement, from 1887, is for a grotesque contraption called Madame Rowley's Toilet Mask, an ad wherein the copywriter, no doubt realizing that this product had little intrinsic glamor potential, settles for a lengthy dogged enumeration of the claims made by the product's manufacturers to win customers. The layout, therefore, consists mostly of print (a tiny picture of the unattractive mask clamped into position onto a woman's face occupies the exact center of the spread) and ends with a not unusual ad ploy--an unelaborated appeal to a scientific rationale behind the product: "VALUABLE ILLUSTRATED TREATISE, WITH PROOFS AND PARTICULARS. MAILED FREE BY THE TOILET MASK COMPANY."

This advertisement, almost ludicrously inept by present-day standards, is neither pictorially nor verbally appealing. The language is stilted and formal, and the reader is bombarded with too great a variety of print: several different type-sizes, words in bold-face type, words

all in capital letters, words with initial capital letters--a comprehensive sampler, in fact, of devices for achieving word emphasis, unfortunately presented in such profusion that any emphatic effect is necessarily cancelled.

Viewing such old-fashioned advertisements juxtaposed with very up-to-date layouts, such as those for Yardley makeup, Wrangler's jeans, Dewar's scotch, the reader is immediately aware of the fact that advertising is one genre in which enormous progress has been made--the result of printing innovations, market research, and attentiveness to consumer psychology. Over the years, advertisements have become vastly more appealing to the eye: color is used extensively whenever possible; the pictures, in general, begin to take up more and more of the available space in the layout; the pictures and the copy are creatively chosen and arranged so as to complement each other and to produce the most pleasing visual effect; the size of the headline increases and the headline caption is devised to be maximally "catchy"; and the type-faces used in a single ad are much more harmonious, less fussy. There is a general trend toward making the people portrayed in the ads more true-to-life, and frequently modern ads show a single person, identified by name (e.g., Dewar's scotch, Wrangler's jeans, Esquire, the Columbia University School of General Studies), with whom the targetted consumer audience can quickly identify, or whom they will desire to emulate. Older advertisements, in contrast, specialized in carefully posed, usually poignant scenes that could easily be illustrations for sentimental best-sellers or stills from early film melodramas. An example is the Listerine ad (from 1923) with the headline, "Often a Bridesmaid

but Never a Bride," which features a woman still young (although, the ad copy says, her birthdays are creeping "toward that tragic thirty mark"), kneeling sad-eyed, forlorn, and somewhat bewildered beside what appears to be her "hope chest" holding an unidentifiable item, no doubt lovingly embroidered by herself, against her wistfully heaving breast.

The single-person "portrait" type of ad reflects an important aspect of modern advertising: industries can now identify with some confidence the significant characteristics of the potential consumer of their products, and ads are designed specifically to appeal to that portion of the population possessing these characteristics. Earlier ads lost impact by attempting to attract too wide a group--the two-dimensional quality of the characters peopling these ads and the impersonal standard-to-formal English style of the copy attest to this lack of focus.

Modern advertisements draw us, almost irresistibly, to the product by the seeming artlessness and spontaneity of the writing style in current copy. Because the audience for each ad is well-defined, just the right tone--intimate, carelessly casual, erudite--can be achieved. Words and phrases found to possess high sales appeal have been carefully documented and are employed lavishly, relentlessly. The word, "natural," for example, has been found to send readers into a frenzy of buying; the word appears with great regularity in the ad selections over an 80-year period, associated with products as diverse as cereals and cosmetics.

Despite the number and variety of the ad selections presented, two important secrets of modern advertising are not well-documented

here. The first is humor. Modern ads avoid such unfortunate, if poetical, phrases as "time's ravages" (used in a 1912 ad for a cosmetic called Pompeian Massage Cream) and concentrate on more positive ideas. It is obvious from the selections that older ads, up through the 1930's, took themselves far too seriously. The depressing Listerine ad was not unique; many of the older selections zero in on personal and social flaws and elaborate on them mercilessly in ads of essay length. The following examples are typical, not only in their stern and serious tone, but also in the formality of the language used. A Smith Brothers Cough Drop ad from 1919 is headlined "A Cough is a Social Blunder," and the text begins:

> People who know have no hesitation in avoiding the cougher. They know that he is a public menace. They know that his cough is a proof of his lack of consideration for others.

An ad for Postum cereal (1924) deals at great length with the topic, "Why Men Crack."

> An authority of international standing recently wrote: "You have overeaten and plugged your organs with moderate stimulants, the worst of which is not only alcohol and tobacco, but caffein and sugar"...He was talking to men who crack physically, in the race for success!

Now, humor pervades advertising and is often handled subtly and well. A number of the modern ads selected in this book employ humor in their approach to the product, but the use of humor in the selections is not in proportion to its use in modern ads generally.

The other secret of modern advertising copy is word play: puns ("How would you like a nice Hawaiian punch?" "Milk has something for every body." "A small deposit secures any article"--headline for a glue ad), unusual spellings ("Beanz meanz Heinz"), alliteration, rhythm,

rhyme, syntactic devices, catch phrases ("I can't believe I ate the whole thing"), coined words, metaphor. The deliberate use of several grammatical "errors" in one ad headline ("Winston tastes good, like a cigarette should") probably made the cigarette ad more well-known than it otherwise would have been, partly because of the ensuing uproar from purists indignant over the contribution of advertising copy to the "corruption" of the native tongue. The ad selections here dip surprisingly little into this vast reservoir of word-juggling devices; a few syntactic peculiarities are to be found here and there, but not much, considering all the possibilities that exist and the high degree to which word play is now employed in ads generally.

It is also apparent from the selections that the editors of the book are men, for they have neglected a huge area of advertising: women's fashions. Possibly they did not feel well-qualified to make representative selections. Still, the gap is rather startling. From a stylistic point of view, even a brief examination of the peculiarities of fashion ad prose would prove highly revealing. Words appear in these ads that are rarely used elsewhere (an example is the word, "luxe," which now seems to appear with epidemic frequency in high fashion ads).

Otherwise, because of the range of products and historical eras represented, the selections are a fine sampling of American advertising as it appears in print. It is important to note, however, that the mainstream of American advertising, particularly in terms of innovations, is not in printed copy, but in television advertising. The distinctions between the two forms of ad presentation (animation and sound vs.

written copy), in terms of the possibilities and limitations inherent in each, would make highly worthwhile reading for students of style, but such a discussion was necessarily beyond the scope of this book.

Of what significance is advertising prose to the student of style? The special characteristics of ad copy are aptly summarized by the editors:

> Advertisements constitute a lively repository of American vocabulary, idiom, metaphor and style, in short, a fairly reliable index of the state of public discourse. They create the one verbal environment in which we all participate, willingly or unwillingly.

Press

A variety of writing types appear in newspapers--straight news reports, editorials, by-lines, interviews, anecdotes, personal commentaries--and this section contains examples of each. On-the-spot news reporting, the staple press composition, is highly uniform in style in comparison with the writing done for other media. Of the kinds of writing presented in this book, newspaper reporting in general allows least opportunity for the writer to display his personal style. Rather, "the exigencies of the newspaper business demand that the writer develop a conformable, transferrable, and conveniently alterable prose." Editors encourage a simple, clear style characterized by short, self-contained paragraphs, a straightforward syntax, little use of adjectival and adverbial embellishments. The article must conform to the general style and image of the newspaper in which it appears. The work must be amenable to easy editing. For this last reason, and also to satisfy readers who may want to skim an article briefly to get the highlights

of a story, newspaper reporters employ an "inverted pyramid" approach, swiftly outlining the main points of the story immediately, then expanding into the details of the event in later paragraphs. If this mode of presentation is employed, the article can be truncated if necessary to fit the available space without losing any of the major details of the story. This accounts for a common fault in journalistic writing: because each new sentence in the article is more susceptible to deletion than the one before it, news writers tend to get careless about their writing towards the end of the article.

An exceptionally good example of straight news reporting presented here is Tom Wicker's 1963 article for The New York Times on the Kennedy assassination--a coolly professional presentation of the facts that generally follows the inverted pyramid formula. Personalities, including Wicker's own, are not in evidence in the article; rather, Wicker's concern is strictly with events and the relationships between them:

> Dallas, Nov. 22--President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was shot and killed by an assassin today.
>
> He died of a wound in the brain caused by a rifle bullet that was fired at him as he was riding through downtown Dallas in a motorcade.
>
> Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson, who was riding in the third car behind Mr. Kennedy's was sworn in as the 36th President of the United States 99 minutes after Mr. Kennedy's death.
>
> Mr. Johnson is 55 years old; Mr. Kennedy was 46.

Following Wicker's newspaper article on the assassination is a magazine piece he wrote recounting his experiences on this assignment:

> At first no one knew what happened, or how, or where, much less why. Gradually, bits and pieces began to fall together and within two hours a reasonably coherent version of the story began to be possible. Even now, however, I know no reporter who was there who has a clear and orderly picture of that surrealistic afternoon; it is still a matter of bits and pieces thrown hastily into something like a whole.

The confusion, the hectic writing schedule, the conflicting reports on the rapidly-occurring events, the sense of tragedy and personal loss--all of these describe Wicker's day, but no hint of them shows up in his news article. The two articles by Wicker give a fine example of the stylistic contrasts between a news report and a personal account of an experience.

Besides the Kennedy assassination, a number of other momentous historical events and personages are described in the selections. There are two articles on Lincoln's assassination, and the tendency toward greater display of emotion in nineteenth-century journalism is apparent when these articles are contrasted with the unfailingly calm tone of Wicker's piece. There is an 1877 interview with Sitting Bull (in which the old chief describes with great dignity and nobility the battle at the Little Big Horn), articles on Edison's invention of the vitascope, the first flight of the Wright brothers' airplane, the bombing of Nagasaki, the murder of a Mafia leader, the first moonwalk, the Woodstock phenomenon.

One can understand that the enforced style of straight news reporting might become rather confining for the writer of genius, especially if there were a lull in news events. Mark Twain, who like many other famous writers began his writing career as a newspaper reporter, had a solution for these problems. While writing for the Virginia City, Nevada, Territorial Enterprise, he sometimes invented news stories and then cheerily presented them as factual reports, faithfully observing the serious tone and style of legitimate news stories. Two of these

delightful fictitious compositions are included here. One is a straightforward account, completely fabricated, of the discovery of a "petrified man" in Nevada. Despite the article's appearance as the very model of strictly factual, impersonal reporting, several suspicious phrases in it might have alerted the reader that the article was a hoax:

> The people of the neighborhood volunteered to bury the poor unfortunate, and were even anxious to do so; but it was discovered, when they attempted to remove him, that the water which had dripped upon him for ages from the crag above, had coursed down his back and deposited a limestone sediment under him which had glued him to the bed rock upon which he sat, as with a cement of adamant, and Judge S. refused to allow the charitable citizens to blast him from his position.

The other Twain article, obviously fictitious, is an outrageous parody of society-page stories, called 'The Pioneer's Ball.' The reporter begins by remarking on the significant number of beautiful belles at the ball ("Four out of every five ladies present were pretty. The ratio at the Colfax party was two out of every five"). Scrupulous attention is paid to the ladies' attire ("Mrs. C. N. was superbly arrayed in kid gloves. Her modest and engaging manner accorded well with the unpretending simplicity of her costume, and caused her to be regarded with absorbing interest by everyone"). Unfortunately, after such a good start, the report degenerates rather seriously toward the end when the author, much in the manner of some society reporters then and now, allows himself the unprofessional luxury of displaying just a twinge of personal vindictiveness toward one of the guests:

> Being offended with Miss X., and our acquaintance having ceased prematurely, I will take this opportunity of observing to her that it is of no use for her to be slopping off to every ball that takes place...Everybody knows that she is old; everybody knows she is repaired (you might almost say built) with artificial

> bones and hair and muscles and things, from the ground up--put together scrap by scrap--and everybody knows, also, that all one would have to do would be to pull out her key-pin and she would go to pieces like a Chinese puzzle.

There is almost no better way of learning the characteristic ingredients of a style than to read or write a parody of it. In these two articles, Twain gives the reader an entertaining lesson in the art of news writing.

Non-event newspaper articles appearing as selections focus on philosophy and politics. Here, emotion and the personal, more casual, voice are more apparent. Abbie Hoffman (under the pen name George Metesky) writes for The Berkeley Barb on the "ideology of failure"--what to do after "dropping out" and becoming hip have made you rich and famous:

> Well, when some of us get to that bracket, either through fame or fortune, we look at ourselves and remember the "Funk" that pushed us into the Lime, and we react....we stay dropped out. We won't, simply won't play the game any longer. We return to the prosperous consumer society and refuse to consume. And refuse to consume. And we do our thing for nothing. In truth, we live our protest. Everything we do is free because we are failures. We've got nothing, so we've got nothing to lose.

Huey Newton (The Black Panther, 1969), presents what he calls "a functional definition of politics" in which he urges the black community to arm themselves as a means of gaining political power in the absence of economic power:

> Black people can develop Self-Defense Power by arming themselves from house to house, block to block, community to community, throughout the nation. . . . We will make it economically non-profitable for the power structure to go on with its oppressive ways.

Perhaps the best piece in the section is Vivian Gornick's "The Next Great Moment in History Is Theirs: An Introduction to the Women's Liberation Movement" (Village Voice, 1969). This lengthy introspective

article is so well-reasoned and comprehensive that it is difficult to believe that it was intended solely as a newspaper article, but the editors make no mention of the appearance of the article in any more enduring medium.

Editorial writing is represented by three pieces. One is an editorial policy statement from the opening issue of Freedom's Journal (1827), the first U. S. newspaper to be owned and edited by blacks. The other two editorials are contrasting statements on the subject of Angela Davis' release from a New York jail while awaiting extradition to California. The ideological gulf between the two editorials, one from the black community-oriented New York Amsterdam News and the other from the conservative New York Daily News is apparent in their opening statements:

> Amsterdam News: "When one considers the Angela Davis case, one must pause before passing any kind of judgment.
>
> But first of all, any judgment in her criminal be suspended until it is brought to trial."
>
> Daily News: "Let's hope Federal judge Morris Lasker knew what he was doing Wednesday when he ordered Angela Davis out of her comfortable, if not luxurious, solitary-confinement cell in the Women's House of Detention on Greenwich Avenue, Manhattan."

The most striking revelation emerging from an examination of the 30 selections representing the press is the extraordinarily high quality of writing achieved in some of the news articles (certainly the most ephemeral of the media considered in this book). To be sure, we are not presented with a random sample of news articles, for the selections include writing by some of the best-known American journalists (e.g., Dorothy Thompson, a distinguished syndicated columnist during the 1930's

and 40's, who, in a 1938 article for The New York Herald Tribune, muses on the significance of the hysterical public reaction to Orson Welles' Halloween radio broadcast of The War of the Worlds. The dense interweaving of themes and forms throughout this book is well-exemplified by the use of this story: the tremendous impact of the radio drama was largely due to its being presented as if it were an on-the-spot news documentary). In addition, a large number of writers more famous for their compositions outside the field of journalism are represented: Benjamin Franklin, Mark Twain, Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, Jack London, Ernest Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson.

This disproportionate use of articles by famous writers is done purposely. A number of these writers reappear as authors of pieces in later sections of the book, enabling the reader to examine changes in style, across genre, in two or more compositions by the same author. In fact, two of the writers, Crane and Drieser, who appear in both the Press and the Classics sections, write on the same subject in both of their compositions, using the experiences they first presented in news articles later as the basis for compositions in a more literary genre. These pairs give the reader a rare opportunity to compare directly two works by the same writer on the same subject--the differences between the two compositions being attributable mainly to the different genres employed and the corresponding change in the makeup of the anticipated audiences for the two works.

Magazine Articles

The introduction to this section stresses that magazines, especially modern magazines, project their own unique images. This image is usually represented by an idealized individual (the magazine's "typical" reader, the editors would have us believe), who embodies a number of attributes that members of the targetted reader population can identify in themselves, or attributes that this population admires and will want to imitate. A magazine's image is therfore like the "brand image" projected by advertisements, and in fact one of the means by which magazines establish and maintain an image is the selection and use of ads in their pages for products that are in keeping with the image. Merely by riffling through the pages of The New Yorker and glancing at the ad pictures, one gets an excellent impression of the type of person the magazine's staff considers its readers to be: polished, urbane, articulate, politically aware, financially well-off, well-travelled (but in love with, and most at home in, New York City), appreciative of the unique and finer things in life (even--or especially-when these things are difficult to locate and expensive to obtain), and possessing a good sense of humor. The more specialized the audience for the magazine (and magazines such as The New Yorker, Cosmopolitan, Esquire, Playboy are rather highly specilized), the more the ads and content reflect this individualized image and focus on objects and topics that could not be of interest to everyone, but only to the chosen "few" to whom the particular magazine caters.

In keeping with the editors' desire for continuity that inspired many of the selections for this book, a number of advertisements for

magazines (including the periodicals just mentioned) appeared in the Advertisements section, clearly displaying each magazine's projected reader image (that is, the image at the time the ad was used; the earliest magazine ad here is fifty years old--the one for The New Yorker. Now, in the Magazine section, the reader is presented with samples of the writing done for these same magazines and can determine for himself whether the articles are in keeping with the magazines' images. They are. A good example is Pauline Kael's review of Love Story (both book and movie versions) for The New Yorker. Kael dismisses Love Story as sentimental twaddle, of interest to New Yorker readers only because the enormous public response to the book and movie is a modern social phenomenon which Kael interprets as a longing for the "reassuring moral universe portrayed in 1940's films":

> Mr. Segal's little golden movie book runs to about twenty-five thousand words. . . . It's a generation-gap variant of a neo-Victorian heartwringer in the movie tradition of "Madame X," "Imitation of Life," and "Magnificent Obsession," with maybe a little "Dark Victory"; it is written in a snappy, tear-jerking, hard-soft style synthesized from "A Farewell to Arms" and "The Sun Also Rises."

The principle underlying Kael's report--that current social mores and modern psychological needs and problems can be analyzed by studying the more popular items in popular media is picked up by Edith Efron in her 1965 T.V. Guide article, "The Soaps--Anything But 99-44/100 Percent Pure." Efron, emerging benumbed from extensive research into the morass of daytime television, reveals the similarities among the soap operas, how "good" and "bad" are facilely distinguished, and how characterizations are quickly established by placing characters either on the right side

or the wrong side of two major issues, marriage and careers. Modern neurotic tendencies are much in evidence:

> In General Hospital Connie's neurotic helplessness proved irresistible some weeks ago; Dr. Doug declared his love. They engaged in a weird verbal competition as to who was more helpless than whom, who was more scared than whom, who "needed" whom more than whom. Doug won. Connie would be his pillar of strength.

As pointed out by Efron, the soap operas are concerned with only certain aspects of modern life; they deal with perennial and current social problems, and the outcomes of the plots are in keeping with the current prevailing social mores. They favor the sensational. In all these respects, the soaps are very much like best selling fiction, to be discussed later.

Themes introduced in the previous section are picked up again: there are Time articles on the Mafia leader's death ("Death of a Maverick Mafioso," 1972), and on Woodstock ("The Message of History's Biggest Happening," 1969). Time ("Though the Heavens Fall") and Newsweek ("Mississippi: The Sound and the Fury") articles on the same event--the violence surrounding the entrance of the first black student at the University of Mississippi--while distinct in style, share features that give a general indication of how news reports in a magazine format are handled differently from newspaper accounts. The narrative is still given straightforwardly, but it is developed chronologically rather than in "inverted pyramid" fashion. Paragraphs are longer. More attention is given to the settings in which the events take place. Direct quotations are used more liberally, and some attempt is made to describe and analyze the personalities and feelings of the main figures in the

events, especially as these characteristics serve as motivating forces behind the actions of the people involved in the story.

Articles that appear on science ("Joey: A Mechanical Boy"--a study of an autistic child by Bruno Bettelheim for Scientific American, 1959), adventure ("The Myth of the Boss Bear," True, 1973), travel ("Dazzled in Disneyland," Holiday, 1963), fashion ("The Blue Jeans Craze," Cosmopolitan, 1973), are at once typical for the magazines in which they were published and reflective of topics of interest to readers of popular media.

"Muckraking," the exposure of gross instances of political corruption, inefficiency, or social neglect, is a term that became a household word in the early twentieth century when writers on such topics (both novelists and journalists) were in their hey-day. The muckraking tradition in journalism is represented here by a story from Everybody's Magazine, by William Hard, published in 1908, on the daily lives of young newspaper and messenger boys who earned their living at night on the streets of Chicago, where they were exposed to all the vices of the city. Hard follows the exploits of one particular boy, "Jelly." In describing Jelly's day, Hard tells a paradoxical story that often reads like fiction. Though undereducated (the boys were prone to truancy: "There was no money to be made by going to school and it looked like a waste of time"), Jelly was precociously wise in the ways of the world and highly ingenious at devising schemes for making extra money. Though shorter and weaker in general than other boys their age, the news/messenger boys maintained a hard, rigorous schedule for years, often getting by on just a few hours of sleep. Poor but not desperately

poor, Jelly and the other boys were not above making their situation seem more pathetic than it was in order to wring money and sympathy from passersby. Hard's article, with its successful interweaving of sociological data with the appealing portrait of Jelly, was instrumental in the initiation of child labor reform legislation.

A superb article by Gay Talese ("Frank Sinatra Has a Cold," Esquire, 1966) is an example of the so-called "new journalism," a form that Talese himself describes in the introduction to the selection as being a blend of traditional reporting techniques and the techniques of fiction. According to Talese, the writer in the new journalism mode attempts to give a truthful report on his subject, but does not limit himself to "the mere compilation of verifiable facts, the use of direct quotations, and adherence to the rigid organizational style of the older form." In search of "a larger truth," the new journalist takes a more imaginative approach to his subject, injecting himself into the narrative if he wishes, attempting to capture not only the subject but the whole atmosphere that surrounds him. This is a difficult approach to use, because in order for it to be successful, the writer must convince his readers not only that he is keenly perceptive, but that he has selected and reported his perceptions in such a way as to build a truthful story --and this while avoiding the use of the most of the typical clues to the reader that what he is getting is the truth. In this article, the formula has worked exceedingly well. Building on moods, incident, details, Talese draws a sensitive portrait of a highly complex personality for whom, despite all his faults, the reader is led to feel both sympathy and admiration.

Two other examples of the new journalism approach are also included, "Twirling at Ole Miss" (Esquire, 1963), a comic and bemused description of the Dixie National Baton Institute by Terry Southern, author of Candy, and "The Howard Hughes Underground" (Saturday Evening Post, 1967), by the novelist, Joan Didion. These two articles reflect a trend in modern journalism to match strong writing personalities with unlikely topics and await the interesting effects. The effect, in the case of the Southern article, is a rather giddy sensation, like getting to view a demure girls' school through the eyes of Attila the Hun.

Two of the articles here are of particular interest because they are examples of a powerful, individual writing style transcending the constraints of the reportorial form. Norman Mailer writes an essay for Life (1971) on the Ali-Frazier fight, and the voice here--highly metaphorical, immediate, intense, repetitive--is not significantly different from the one that will relate the first moon-walk in Of a Fire on the Moon (an excerpt of which appears in the Classics section). Mailer writes of momentous events; he feels, and makes the reader feel, a total involvement in the essential life struggle that the event signifies. Sometimes Mailer is the enthralled observer, absorbing with gusto the sights, smells, dialogue surrounding the action, but he can shift neatly, becoming the voice of the main character in the event, as if he observes so keenly, so committedly, that he can, he must, all at once find himself inside the skin of an actor in this larger-than-life drama:

> ...and the head of a fighter or the leather of the bag as it rolled against his own head was nothing but some abstract thunk of material, not a thing, not a man, but thunk! thunk! something of an obstacle, thunk! thunk! thunk! to beat into thunk! ob[illegible]ion.

> And his breath came in -ips and sobs as he smashed into the bag as if it were real...

The other article is by William Faulkner, "On Privacy," (Harper's Magazine, 1955), in which he complains of the loss of respect for "the American dream"--privacy and the dignity of the individual. His long, sonorous paragraphs are built of highly complex sentences in which an idea is caught, handled, lovingly and leisurely analyzed in a way that is uniquely Faulkner's own:

> Not just an idea, but a condition: a living human condition designed to be coeval with the birth of America itself, engendered created and simultaneous with the very air and word America, which at that one stroke, one instant, should cover the whole earth with one simultaneous suspiration like air or light. And it was, it did: radiating outward to cover even the old weary repudiated still-thralled nations, until individual men everywhere, who had no more than heard the name, let alone knew where America was, could respond to it, lifting up not only their hearts but the hopes to which until now they did not know--or anyway dared not remember--that they possessed.

Selections by Mailer and Faulkner also appear in the Classics section, and a comparison of the two works by each author reveals no appreciable difference in quality of style as they moved from one genre to another. This is in contrast to the pairs of writings included for Crane and Dreiser, where their styles changed radically when their stories were retold in a medium other than newspaper reportage. A possible conclusion to be drawn from these comparisons is that the news story format is more confining, more removed from the language of fiction than is the magazine article.

Best Sellers

Best sellers partake to a greater or lesser degree of the qualities of all the other types of popular writing discussed and illustrated in

this book. They are sustained, interwoven compositions and in this respect may be compared with the classics treated in the following section. On the other hand, a best seller is a work that appears at the right time and is very much a product of its time; thus it has many affinities with pieces appearing in media devoted to topics of current interest (magazines and the press) and with advertising--for the best seller, like the ad, capitalizes on the current identified taste, morality, and fantasies of a broad reading public.

A best seller is easy to define: it is a book that has been bought in large quantities. A book may be a best seller for a week or a generation or throughout the history of publishing. If the book is merely a best seller--i.e., lacking in the qualities that make a classic, it will not endure beyond the era whose tastes and needs it reflects. The very topicality that contributes to the best seller's extraordinary popularity often dooms the work to ultimate extinction, since the focus of the work is usually on exactly those issues and ideas currently most tangible to the society, and it is this surface level of ideas that is the most susceptible to change.

Like many classical works, best selling fiction often makes use of age-old successful story formulas, well-worn themes and character types that the public never seems to tire of, recasting these in a modern idiom. One of the common ingredients of best selling fiction is the hero who is a paragon of masculinity, represented here by such characters as Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan (Tarzan of the Apes, 1914), Zane Grey's Nevada (Nevada, 1928), Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer (I, the Jury, 1947), and Grace Metalious' Michael Rossi (Peyton Place,

1956). The general formula for creating a work of fiction that will be commercially highly successful seems to be to find some topic of current popular interest and then incorporate it in a story that also employs familiar themes and character types. Readers will respond eagerly when they feel they are being entertained and informed at the same time. The phenomenal success of works like Uncle Tom's Cabin, Hawaii, and The Godfather can be at least partially attributed to such a combination.

Uncle Tom's Cabin is rarely read anymore. It is an emotional book written in an emotional age, and its key ingredient is one of the most overt writing techniques known for manipulating an audience: sentimentality. Our modern age professes to scorn any reliance on sentimentality in writing; we approach with amusement works that our nineteenth-century ancestors wept over and lost themselves in, finding the style much too obtrusive and cloying for our tastes. And yet we can still be moved by the tricks of sentimental writing, even while fully aware we are being manipulated--what else is behind the amazing success of Love Story but the public's ability and willingness to respond to the overtly sentimental? In the following passage from Uncle Tom's Cabin, the reader is bombarded with some of Mrs. Stowe's arsenal of sentimental techniques: rather than using detail, incident, and character personality to build up emotion in the reader indirectly, all the appropriate emotional responses are presented directly to the reader, so that he has no chance to use his intellect or his imagination; in addition, she stacks up emotional details far beyond what is necessary, and overuses exaggerated modifiers ("wild," "utter," "mortal," "suffocating"). The two-dimensional

characters are another symptom of sentimentality, which relies on them for a simple, predictable reader effect. Finally, and in case some readers might somehow still have failed to get her message, Mrs. Stowe intrudes the narrator's voice into the story line to deliver some asides with a feeble irony:

> "Lucy," said the trader, "your child's gone; you may as well know it first as last. You see, I know'd you couldn't take him down south; and I got a chance to sell him to a first-rate family, that'll raise him better than you can."
>
> The trader had arrived at that stage of Christian and political perfection which has been recommended by some preachers and politicians of the north, lately, in which he had completely overcome every humane weakness and prejudice. His heart was exactly where yours, sir, and mine could be brought, with proper effort and cultivation. The wild look of anguish and utter dispair that the woman cast on him might have disturbed one less practiced; but he was used to it. You can get used to such things, too, my friend; and it is the great object of recent efforts to make our whole northern community used to them, for the glory of the Union. So the trader only regarded the mortal anguish which he saw working in those dark features, those clenched hands, and suffocating breathings, as necessary incidents of the trade, and merely calculated whether she was going to scream, and get up a commotion on the boat; for, like other supporters of our peculiar institution, he decidedly disliked agitation.

There are several other interesting features of best selling fiction that serve to distinguish it from more enduring literary forms. As pointed out earlier, the best seller capitalizes on the prevailing moral standards in a society. Within a best seller, however, these societal standards are generally upheld, not tampered with. Such books do not pique the reader so much as comfort him for holding particular points of view. While best selling works of fiction may contain liberal amounts of sex and violence, for example, in the end the fantasies are usually laid to rest, and the values of the society are reaffirmed.

At the end of Peyton Place Michael Rossi marries and settles down; in Tarzan, the noble savage ultimately becomes civilized ("I am Monsieur Tarzan," the ape-man introduces himself in the final scene).

The major feature that distinguishes the best seller from the classic is the quality of the writing style. It is obvious from the selections here that one does not need to write well in order to become a best selling author. One need only write accessibly. Metalious' writing, for example, is flawed and awkward, but never obscure:

> A few days later, Michael Rossi stepped off the train in front of the Peyton Place railroad station. No other passenger got off with him. He paused on the empty platform and looked around thoroughly, for it was a habit with him to fix a firm picture of a new place in his mind so that it could never be erased nor forgotten. He stood still, feeling the two heavy suitcases that he carried pulling at his arm muscles, and reflected that there wasn't much to see, nor to hear, for that matter. It was shortly after seven o'clock in the evening, but it might have been midnight or four in the morning for all the activity going on. Behind him there was nothing but the two curving railroad tracks and from a distance came the long-drawn-out wail of the train as it made the pull across the wide Connecticut River. And it was cold.

Mickey Spillane's prose sounds like a parody of itself:

> In there. The words hit me hard. In there was my best friend lying on the floor dead. The body. Now I could call it that. Yesterday it was Jack Williams, the guy that shared the same mud bed with me through two years of warfare in the stinking slime of the jungle. Jack, the guy who said he'd give his right arm for a friend and did when he stopped a Jap from slitting me in two. He caught the bayonet in the biceps and they amputated his arm.

Most of the non-fiction best sellers represented here are "how-to" books written in response to a popular need for information and guidance. The earliest of these selections is Miss Leslie's Behaviour Book from 1859. An excerpt from another famous etiquette book, Emily Post's, 1969 ed. also appears. The other non-fiction how-to selections

are equally well-known: Dale Carnegie's How To Win Friends and Influence People (1936), Funk and Lewis' Thirty Days to a More Powerful Vocabulary, and Dr. Spock's The Common Sense Book of Baby Care.

Three of the non-fiction selections do not fit into the how-to mold. The Preface from Benjamin Franklin's Poor Richard's Almanac, entitled "The Way to Wealth," is not at all a practical guide to acquiring fortune, but rather consists of a string of maxims, either collected or made up by Franklin: "Keep thy Shop, and thy Shop will keep thee," "Experience keeps a dear School, but Fools will learn in no other, and scarce in that." An Excerpt from The Hidden Persuaders by Vance Packard (1957) details the methods used by advertisers and packagers to make products irresistible to the consumer. Packard's descriptions enable the reader to reapproach all those appealing ads in the first section of the book with keener awareness of how he is being manipulated by Madison Avenue. Packard's writing is an extended form of muckraking, discussed earlier.

The third book that is not in the how-to category is Eldridge Cleaver's Soul on Ice (1968), the only autobiographical work included in this section. Cleaver's book is a good choice for inclusion in this sampling of American writing since his is a unique and authentic American voice, describing eloquently what it is like to be black, self-educated, and imprisoned (much of the book was written while Cleaver was serving time in Folsom Prison). Later, in the Classics section, which contains a number of autobiographical and biographical accounts, a selection from Richard Wright's Black Boy (1945) appears, necessarily dealing with many of the same themes that Cleaver's book does. Cleaver's

writing style is definitely superior to those of most of the other best selling authors, and his work could have been placed, with justification, among the Classics selections.

It is somewhat surprising that representatives of the so-called journalistic novel are not included in this book, where the editors seem to have been particularly concerned with using selections that contain characteristics of more than one genre. Truman Capote's In Cold Blood, for example, would appear to be a logical choice for inclusion among the best sellers. One wonders why popular writers like Truman Capote and Gore Vidal are not represented, while two of Mailer's works are included. It is possible that the omission of certain writers was due to copyright problems; however, the editors mention only one instance of this: restrictions on excerpting portions of Gone With the Wind prevented the editors using this work, one of the best selling novels of all time.

The editors do not describe the criteria they used for choosing the selections for this section. The works represented (all the selections are excerpts from full-length books) are not simply the best selling books in the history of the U. S., although some of the choices have made sales records for their publishers (Peyton Place, The Godfather, Love Story, The Common Sense Book of Baby Care, How To Win Friends and Influence People). Rather, the editors seem to have chosen those works they felt would be most representative of the attributes they identify as being characteristic of a best selling work, whether of fiction or nonfiction. In addition, works and authors have been chosen who have

won popular, but usually not critical, acclaim (Soul on Ice and The Godfather are exceptions to this) possibly to make contrasts between the best selling and classics selections more apparent.

Classics

Like the Best Seller section, the Classics chapter contains both fiction and nonfiction entries. While the best selling fiction selections were all excerpts from full-length books, most of the fiction in the Classics section consists of short stories. There are eleven stories in the section, the earliest of which is Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Wives of the Dead," published in 1832. Edgar Allan Poe is represented by his story, "The Man of the Crowd" (not his best story, nor even a typical one), which is narrated in the first person by a character who appears to be a born detective--perhaps the first appearance of this well-loved character type in literature. Three frequently-anthologized works, Mark Twain's The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," Faulkner's The Bear (Part 1), and Hemingway's "The Killers," are included. Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat" (1897) is the fictionalized account of his near-drowning off the coast of Florida after the boat he was in sank while on its way to Cuba with guns and ammunition for Cuban insurgents; his newspaper account of the same incident ("Stephen Crane's Own Story," The New York Press, 1897) appeared in the Press section.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's lovely story, "Winter Dreams," contains two of his standard characters--the ambitious young college man and the beautiful, spoiled, vivacious, and doomed young woman that he loves but will never have. His theme is the universal one of the passing of youth

and innocence as embodied in the loss of a first love. John Updike's "A & P" and Joyce Carol Oates' "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been" also deal with turning points in the lives of youthful characters, but while Updike's narrative is an understated study of normal personalities in which nothing much really goes on, Oates' haunting, frightening story builds to nightmare proportions as a fifteen-year old girl finds that her teenage yearnings and foolishness have unleashed forces that she is unable to control.

Flannery O'Connor's "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" is also haunting, a study of grotesques set in a southern landscape of poverty and meanness. In this story, a crafty old woman with an aging, deafmute, retarded daughter on her hands tries to hoodwink a fast-talking drifter with one arm into becoming her son-in-law and resident handyman, but in the end it is she who is deceived.

John Dos Passos' trilogy, U.S.A. (1938), represented here by two excerpts, is a collage of writing genres and styles, presenting a fictional history of America during the first third of this century. Because U.S.A. includes news accounts, biographical data on famous Americans, and a continuous narrative, it resembles the present book in being a kind of microcosm of American literature and culture and therefore is a particularly appropriate choice for representation here. Also, the two biographical sketches that comprise the U.S.A. selection concern people and events that were written of in news articles appearing earlier in the book. Dos Passos' essays on Thomas Edison ("The Electrical Wizard") and the Wright Brothers ("The Campers at Kitty Hawk") are impressionistic in approach. Rather than developing a straightforward

chronological narrative, in each case Dos Passos presents a disjointed list of facts and impressions, (not distinguishing major facts or incidents from minor facts or opinion--all are delivered off-handedly and with equal emphasis, as if to say, "Make whatever you want out of this") to build an image of the people he is writing about. In these two passages at least, Dos Passos uses series extensively, nesting within the factual series phrases containing repetitive elements that also become series, until the narrative takes on the tone and appearance of a litany:

> Thomas A. Edison at eighty two worked sixteen hours a day;
> he never worried about mathematics or the social system or generalized philosophical concepts;
> in collaboration with Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone who never worried about mathematics or the social system or generalized philosophical concepts;
> he worked sixteen hours a day trying to find a substitute for rubber; whenever he read about anything he tried it out; whenever he got a hunch he went to the laboratory and tried it out.

In addition to the excerpt from Mailer's Of a Fire on the Moon, mentioned previously, there are six other nonfiction selections under Classics, of which four are autobiographical accounts: Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography (1771), Frederick Douglas' Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas (1845), Theodore Dreiser's A Book About Myself: Newspaper Days (1922), and Richard Wright's Black Boy (1945). All of these deal in some respect with the author's education, especially in reading and writing. Dreiser's passage describes his personal experiences in covering and writing up the railroad disaster, his newspaper account of which is included among the Press selections. Two of the other selections here are also concerned with techniques and problems of language. An excerpt from Emerson's Nature (1836) on "Language" makes

the extended point that language, especially figurative language, enables us to make analogies between object and idea, and therefore all nature "is a metaphor of the human mind." An essay by Mark Twain, "How To Tell a Story," is an eloquent description of some of the particular characteristics of storytelling (mimicry, parody, nuance of tone, use of non-sequiturs) stemming from the oral tradition of American humor:

> For instance, he would say eagerly, excitedly: "I once knew a man in New Zealand who hadn't a tooth in his head"--here his animation would die out; a silent, reflective pause would follow, then he would say dreamily, and as if to himself, "and yet that man could beat a drum better than any man I ever saw."

The discussion opening this section is the least convincing of the descriptions of the different approaches to writing in the five genres represented. The problem here involves the definition of "classic" and the selections used as examples of writing thought to be both classic and popular. The editors define a classic as a durable composition: writing that stays in print. But, using this criterion, one cannot determine whether a recent piece is a classic, or will become one. To achieve the status of a classic, a work must prove itself by continuing to be read and enjoyed by readers over a period of time. Nevertheless, the editors have included contemporary works among their selections--the short stories by Updike and Oates were published in the 1960's, and Mailer's Of a Fire on the Moon is as recent as the 1970 moon flight it describes. The editors appear to believe that a classic is not so much defined by the work itself as by its author--a writer who almost unfailingly finds a readership, no matter what he writes. This point of view is evidenced by the editors' decision to concentrate on short stories for the fiction entries in this section, using works by authors

who are better known for their novels than for their short stories (the major exception is Poe), as if almost any mature piece by one of these writers could be considered a classic.

This editorial decision carries with it both advantages and disadvantages for the reader. The classic fiction selections enable the reader to examine a composition by a gifted writer in its entirety and to observe how narrative elements can be worked into an effective whole. However, a critical comparison of best selling fiction and the classic selections is impossible because the works of fiction in each section are from two different genres--novels in the Best Seller section and short stories in the Classics section. Also, because the short stories can be presented intact, the effects of whatever stylistic techniques the writer is using are fully observable, while in the best seller selections they are not, since only excerpts are given. This gives the selections presented as classics an added advantage, because they can be more fully appreciated by the reader.

"Classic" literature, then, may be distinguished from merely popular literature on the basis of style and audience. Popular literature relies an accessible, relatively uncomplicated language that can be understood and appreciated by a diverse audience. Classics require more from their readers. They are more likely to contain a multiplicity of styles and to shift in style, tone, or point of view--maneuvering the narrative in ways that will cause less stalwart readers to give up. Often the writers of such works appear to make only reluctant concessions to narrative considerations, as if they are far less concerned

with the progress of the story than with creating an atmosphere for the reader, or developing the subtleties of a character's personality. Writers of classics take more chances than do writers of popular literature: they lead, and the audience must follow as best they can, but these writers will not cater to the "average" reader.